Ed 8/13

U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
LAURO F. CAVAZOS

CHOICE IN EDUCATION

Remarks Made at
Education Press
Association
"Newsmaker" Luncheon

National Press Club
Washington, D.C.

May 19, 1989

READEX FICHE best copy available

ED 1.2:

RESTRUCTURING AMERICAN EDUCATION THROUGH CHOICE

It is a pleasure to join you today and share some thoughts and plans for education in the near future.

This nation suffers from three deficits—a trade deficit, a budget deficit and an education deficit. All three of these deficits are linked and, I submit, that the trade and budget deficits will not be resolved until we overcome the education deficit.

One can quantitate the trade and budget deficits. It is done daily in Washington to the nearest million. I can quantitate the education deficit:

- 27 million adults are illiterate
- 28 percent of our students drop out of high school
- the national high school graduation rate is only 71.5 percent
- SAT and ACT scores have declined or remain static for the last three years
- U.S. students score low in math and science when compared to their peers in other industrialized nations.

By any measure one wishes to apply, we are failing or not making progress.

What is the solution? I believe that we must first have a national commitment to excellence in educa-tion and, second, we must restructure elementary and secondary education in this nation.

By restructuring, I mean developing and implementing strategies that will improve the educational process at the elementary and secondary school level. Some examples of restructuring include:

- curriculum reform that results in better education
- alternative certification of teachers and principals
- early childhood education to make every experience of young children a learning situation
- more educational decision authority for teachers and parents
- educational deregulation or cutting red tape
- choice

Again, a total restructuring and we must start now. Time is against us and for too long, decisions on what is taught by our schools have been the exclusive province of professional educators. We have paid a high price for that exclusivity in lowered parental interest and a boring sameness among our schools. Again and again, scholars studying American education have bemoaned a widespread lack of parental

concern and involvement in the education of their children and noted a remarkable national uniformity in the methods and organization of our schools.

But this is changing. Lately, we have begun to see glimmerings of a new level of diversity in American education, a diversity based on providing parents and students with an array of choices in both the form and substance of educational offerings. Whenever choice appears, commitment and involvement in education have been revitalized and that revitalization sets the scene for a leap forward in achievement. It is that crucial next step, the provision of choice in education that I would like to discuss with you today. I consider choice the cornerstone to restructuring elementary and secondary education is this country.

Why do I believe so strongly in choice in education? Because I believe in young people like Andre Lawrence and Chris Schaefer.

'Whenever choice appears, commitment and involvement in education have been revitalized."

Andre is graduating from the Jose Feliciano School for the Performing Arts in East Harlem next month. This young man lives on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and must leave his home shortly after dawn each morning to catch the subway which takes him across the city to East Harlem. Andre could walk to a neighborhood school but it doesn't offer the curriculum that interests him and there are problems with drugs near the school. At the School for Performing Arts, he has grown academically and polished his considerable skills in music. And his musical talent would have gone untapped if he had not had a magnet school to attend. Thus, choice provided education and opportunity.

Chris Schaefer almost dropped out of school two years ago. To quote Chris, he was "sleepwalking through his classes" in his local high school, in a state of "educational depression." The choice reforms in Minnesota saved Chris as a student. With support from his mother, he enrolled at the Chisago-Pine Area Learning Center. In his new school, Chris has developed his potential as a writer and his grades have improved.

Andre and Chris have had the advantage of choice in education. Working with their parents, they determined the school that would provide the best education for them.

Because of choice, we have seen remarkable changes in East Harlem. Test scores have risen and admission of students from East Harlem to the selective high schools in the city has climbed dramatically. It is axiomatic that good schools take care of and educate all students to their fullest potential. The blueprint is clear—all we need to do is to follow it to bring about positive change.

"It is axiomatic that good schools take care of and educate all students to their fullest potential."

Minnesota has been putting the nation's most ambitious state-wide choice program in effect since 1985. This program offers open enrollment across district lines, post-secondary options, and area learning centers, like the one Chris attends. The successes here have inspired Iowa and Arkansas to enact open enrollment legislation, and it is reported that 21 states are considering choice programs.

All our young people should have the opportunities offered by choice that have benefited students like Andre and Chris. We must do away with ineffective conventional arrangements that only block reform.

It is expected that choice will promote school reform. Initially we tried to improve education by imposing regulations from the top down while leaving the basic structure of our schools untouched. Obviously, this has not worked.

In the current movement of reform, schools must be responsive to parents, students and teachers. To accomplish this, schools need the freedom to change and innovate.

Schools should remain accountable, of course, but accountable to parents, teachers and students as well as to central administrators.

In short, we must infuse our schools with the ingredients that are essential to any enterprise—entrepreneurship and accountability. Choice offers this opportunity.

The failings of our school system today affect all children, but none more severely than America's minority and disadvantaged young people. You are well aware of the tragic

situation in some of our inner-city and rural schools where it is common for half or more of the minority students to drop out...and for those who do graduate to go out into the world unprepared for college and the workplace.

It's not enough to deplore the situation or to blame it on a supposed lack of money. We already spend more on our students than any major industrialized country in the world. No, as I emphasized earlier, I believe that we can no longer patch, adjust, tinker and complain. It is time to act. The solution is restructuring and the catalyst is choice.

No child, no matter his or her circumstances, should be compelled to attend a failing school, or one that does not meet their academic needs. Choice offers parents, students and teachers the opportunity to select the better schools if the neighborhood school is faulty or if it cannot satisfy educational requirements. Through choice, we can exercise the same kind of judgment in selecting schools that we take for granted in making other decisions.

"Through choice, we can exercise the same kind of judgment in selecting schools that we take for granted in making other decisions."

Those who have benefited from choice are pleased with it. Yet, relatively few students have access to choice despite the benefits. This must be changed.

The President has called for "a second great wave of education reform" where choice is "perhaps the single most promising" idea. As David Kearns, the Chairman of Xerox, says, "To be successful, the new agenda for school reform must be driven by competition and market discipline...the objective should be clear from the outset: complete restructuring... The public schools must change if we are to survive."

Where choice is used, it works. Charles Glenn, the civil rights director for the Massachusetts Department of Education, says choice can promote equity, ".. by creating conditions which encourage schools to become more effective.. by allowing schools to specialize and thus to meet the needs of some students very well rather than all students at a level of minimum adequacy, and...by increasing the influence of parents over the education of their children in a way which is

largely conflict free. We have become excited about the potential of choice for public education."

There are many reasons to be in concert with the innovations that choice can bring. This approach recognizes that there is no "one best way" for everyone. Children have different needs and learning modes. Teachers have different approaches. Parents have different philosophies. Choice allows schools to draw strength from diversity by developing different programs. It allows each school to excel.

And, choice does something more: it empowers parents by bringing them into the decision-making process. It encourages teachers and principals to become entrepreneurs and structure their curriculum and standards; students are encouraged to become learners with options that direct and capture their potential.

A free and productive society thrives on empowerment of the people. The American economy and our democracy are products of empowerment, and this approach can revitalize schools around the country.

"The American economy and our democracy are products of enpowerment, and this approach can revitalize schools around the country."

For an example of choice across a broad front, we only need to look at the system of postsecondary education in this country. At the postsecondary level, schools compete for students, offering a variety of programs to satisfy distinct needs. We have a fine system of universities and colleges...some say the best in the world. The rector of a university in Russia who was on a tour of our higher education system recently observed that "American universities are not good because the United States is rich. America is rich because it has good universities." That's quite an endorsement. And students from all over the globe come to this country to attend our universities and colleges.

My point is basic...there are choices at the postsecondary level of education in this country and they have helped to produce the highest caliber educational system. I am convinced that the same approach can promote progress and success for our elementary and secondary schools.

There is one thing I want to make clear before going on. I have heard the criticism that choice would promote a two-tiered system of education, that is, one system for the fortunate and another for the disadvantaged. It is blind not to recognize that inequities already exist in our schools. It assumes that choice cannot be exercised in an effective and responsible manner by *all* parents and students to improve their situation. I say, enable all Americans to make choices in education. Furthermore, armed with the power of choice, parents can force inferior schools to *upgrade or close*. No citizen should attend a second rate school in the United States of America.

"No citizen should attend a second rate school in the United States of America."

President Bush and I are determined to use the power of choice to help restructure American education. The President, who visited a magnet school in Rochester just yesterday, has asked Congress to expand the federal magnet schools program in the "Educational Excellence Act of 1989," and I strongly endorse that proposal. Among other issues, this measure also calls for alternative certification of teachers; recognizing Merit Schools, outstanding teachers and science scholars; and the funding of drug prevention programs.

In order to provide momentum in the national effort on choice in education, I am announcing several federal initiatives.

First, I will move immediately to convene four Regional Strategy Meetings composed of teams of Governors, legislators, State Education Chiefs and parents to develop innovations to promote choice in their respective states.

Second, I am creating in our own office a special task force to promote, encourage and evaluate choice programs and report to me on a quarterly basis regarding our progress in those areas. Based on the findings of the task force, you will be hearing more from us on additional federal activities.

Third, I am today naming Jack Klenk of our staff as a Special Advisor on Choice Programs to work on the development of further initiatives.

Fourth, I am directing the Office of Educational Research

and improvement to identify choice as a major priority of grants to be awarded this year under the Secretary's Fund for Innovation in Education.

We are also aware of a special and critical obligation to see that the public has valid information at its disposal for making choices in education. I plan two immediate actions to fulfill that responsibility.

First, I am releasing two publications that distill the theory and practice of choice, and will release two others in the near future.

Choosing a School for Your Child is a practical guide for parents on how to select a school. Although this booklet is designed for parents, we believe it will also interest educators and policymakers. This publication will be translated into Spanish to ensure its widest distribution to the public. Parents can get these booklets free of charge through the Consumer Information Center.

"Our past successes were built on a recognition that parents, teachers, students and local school administrators must work together to educate our nation's children."

The second book, *Educating Our Children: Parents and Schools Together*, is a report prepared for the President in January 1989 by the Working Group on the Parental Role in Education. It addresses the issue of parental involvement as a key factor in educating children.

Improving Schools and Empowering Parents: The White House Workshop on Choice in Education will discuss that conference and provide background on the issue of choice. This booklet will be released this summer, along with *Parental Choice in Six Nations*.

At the request of the state of Minnesota, I am ordering the Department to conduct a three-year evaluation of the impact of that state's ambitious open-enrollment choice program. Governor Rudy Perpich's pioneering efforts in Minnesota provide an unparalled laboratory for looking at what works and how it works in choice programs.

The American public education system was once the envy of the world. Our past successes were built on a recognition that parents, teachers, students and local school administrators must work together to educate our nation's children. We strayed from this solid principle some time ago and placed our trust in processes and institutions that distanced parents and students from their educational systems. The concept of choice returns the crucial element of parent and student involvement. This involvement revives the relationship between parent and teacher, parent and principal, parent and student, and parent and parent, thereby rekindling community concern for education in this great country.

"He is free who lives as he chooses," a Greek philosopher wrote nearly 2000 years ago. Americans today still hold firmly to that ancient but timeless ideal. To be an American means to have choices. Yet, ironically, we are often powerless to make one decision with a profound and enduring effect...where to send our children to school.

Thank you.

Lauro F. Cavazos was asked by President George Bush to continue as Secretary of Education following the November 1988 presidential election. Secretary Cavazos was originally nominated for the post by President Ronald Reagan on August 9, 1988, and was unanimously confirmed by the Senate on September 20, 1988.